

INTRODUCTION

The Changing Ecology of U.S. Higher Education

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Between 1945 and 1990 the United States built the largest and most productive higher education system in world history. The scale of this accomplishment has only recently been fully appreciated. There were few problems for which higher education was not deployed in remedy during the decades immediately following World War II. Investments in science would ensure the technological supremacy of the United States and enable it to improve the lives of people worldwide. New college and university campuses would make parochial places more cosmopolitan. Expanded access to college educations would facilitate individual mobility and help remediate injustices of socioeconomic inequality. Such ambitions were pursued through a complicated compact between businesspeople, politicians, and academic leaders who viewed higher education expansion as reciprocally beneficial to their interests (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Kerr, 2001; Loss, 2012; Lowen, 1997). The enterprise was resourced by the longest-lasting and most broadly distributed economic prosperity in American history.

There can be little doubt that this golden era is over. Steadily eroding state government support for higher education has made college completion harder to attain, as public systems cut budgets for academic and student-support services ever closer to bone. Tuition and fees have long been rising faster than the rate of inflation with virtually no regulatory constraint, while greater proportions of college costs are borne by students and their families in the form of government-subsidized loans. The accountability revolution that transformed K–12 schools has come to higher education, bringing new expectations

for colleges and universities to demonstrate efficiency and productivity—however these terms may be defined. At the same time a host of new businesses offering an array of educational services has emerged offering new alternatives to academic business as usual.

As with any epochal transition, it is tempting to feel a sense of loss about the fading past. Yet this transition has many positive features as well: agreement that attending college has become too expensive, canny entrepreneurial activity in the higher education sector, and productive ferment in national discussions about how college might be more effectively and humanely delivered.

This is the spirit in which the work assembled here was written. Supported with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mike Kirst and I convened a series of national discussions on the fate and future of U.S. higher education at this moment in history. Our focus was on *broad-access schools*: the community colleges, comprehensive public universities, and for-profit institutions that offer admission to most of those who seek to enroll in them. Our goals were straightforward: (1) assemble some of the most provocative writers on higher education irrespective of field and put them into conversation; (2) focus their collective attention on broad-access schools, rather than the academically selective ones that receive the lion's share of academic and media attention; and (3) give writers as much freedom as possible to reimagine how the study of college might be pursued in light of the seismic changes taking place in U.S. higher education. The result is a collection rich with new tools for helping people make more informed and humane decisions about college—for themselves, for their children, and for American society as a whole.

Just as there is little doubt that a golden era has passed, there is little uncertainty that Americans' desire for more higher education will only grow in the coming years. Our country already has invested so much in the promise of higher education that it could hardly be otherwise. Ever more intense and global competition for highly educated workers means that demand for college-level academic services will only grow in the future (Goldin & Katz, 2008). Yet whether those services will come bundled in a package called the *traditional college experience*—on physical campuses, with dormitories, full-time enrollment requirements, and spectator sports—is an open question.

Forward discussions about the future of U.S. higher education will be constrained if we continue to use terms, priorities, and conceptual models

developed by education researchers in the twentieth century. First, inherited academic and policy wisdom assumes a proper and relatively bounded stage of the life course for college: a period just after high school but before career initiation, childbearing, and cohabitation. It imagines a student who enrolls in college full time, ideally resides on a physical campus, remains unmarried and childless while in school, engages in minimal paid work, and completes a degree within four to six years. But in contemporary America, students fitting this description are a shrinking minority of the overall college-going population. Academic research and policy discourse organized on the presumption of such students misrepresents reality.

Second, most inherited academic and policy research is organized as analyses of students *moving through* school. This movement usually is described by linear regression models applied to aggregated individual-level data. Most of what is known about attendance, persistence, completion, and returns to college is a product of this mode of inquiry. Yet this way of doing research systematically obscures schools themselves as units of analysis. When they do appear, schools are independent (not dependent) variables, assemblages of easily measurable characteristics (not complex wholes), and presumed to be vehicles for students' pursuit of their own interests (not actors with interests of their own). While invaluable for twentieth-century education science and policy, such models by themselves are incapable of capturing the organizational fertility, variety, and turbulence of the current historical moment.

Third, educational social science tends to privilege four-year residential education at research universities and liberal arts colleges as the ideal expressions of higher education. This was problematic in the twentieth century—albeit optimistic, as these forms long have held special prestige in the national academic status system. It is simply untenable now. Community colleges are the workhorses of U.S. higher education, serving most of those who attend college and coalescing the academic activity of countless towns and regions. For-profit schools, long important for human-capital development in many skilled trades, now provide the gamut of educational services. They are the fastest-growing component of the national postsecondary sector and are fed by a remarkably large proportion of federal tuition aid.

Fourth, educational social science has long presumed that college requires physical copresence. Researchers have taken for granted that the activities that constitute college necessarily occur on physical campuses through face-to-face interaction among students and instructors. In light of the recent

explosion of online instructional opportunities available to learners worldwide, this presumption can no longer be sustained.

The writers in this collection offer new ways of understanding higher education unconstrained by these limitations. In the next few pages I provide an overview of the intellectual tools many of us have found especially useful for remaking the study of college.

The Ecology Idea

When the authors in this volume describe a higher education ecology, they refer to a specific way of thinking about how organizations work in relation to one another and to their social context. An ecological approach can free analysts of the conceptual limitations imposed by traditional students, linear models of individual academic progression, narrow idealizations of form, and the presumption that college happens through copresence.

For over fifty years the primary analytic strategy that social scientists have used to appraise, understand, and measure higher education has been to model students moving through schools in cohorts. The paradigmatic expressions of this approach are statistical analyses of large aggregations of individual-level data. In narrative form most of them go something like this: those finishing high school are functional adults who make decisions (whether conscious or unconscious, well informed or not) about whether, when, and where to pursue college educations. As these functional adults move through college, they accumulate different amounts and kinds of academic credits. They variably persist at a particular college, transfer or “swirl” between multiple schools, or drop out altogether. Persistence at a single college whose academic profile appropriately matches the academic aptitude of the student is the default ideal. The entire process is presumed to have a proper timetable. College attendance directly after high school, undiluted by paid work, and completed within some specified time window is widely understood to be the optimal way through college.

This way of narrating and modeling higher education fit tidily with an enduring interest across the social sciences in mobility processes in industrial societies and was reinforced by the mathematical apparatus of linear regression analysis. It has been methodologically convenient to model U.S. higher education as the sum of individual students making individual choices about where, when, and under what statistically described conditions they attend

college. This analytic strategy continues to define normal social science approaches to the study of postsecondary education and remains intellectually profitable. Indeed much of the work assembled here is predicated on the huge stock of findings generated by this way of making knowledge. Yet by themselves, linear models of students moving through college profoundly limit our ability to think about colleges themselves as active players in the production of education. Economists describe the problem succinctly: social scientists focus primarily on the demand side and are weak on the supply side of higher education.

Attending more carefully to the supply side is important because of varied changes that together make for the end of an epoch. Table I.1 provides a schematic depiction of these changes: chronic declines in state funding for public colleges and universities; unabated tuition price escalation and an ongoing shift of college costs from governments to students and their families; an accountability revolution obliging schools to measure learning and other kinds of productivity as never before; rapid growth of for-profit education businesses; the expansion and normalization of digitally mediated instruction; and an overall shift in the cultural meaning of higher education, from a collective project of nation-building to an individual project of income growth and career enhancement.

TABLE I.1 Recent epochs of U.S. higher education

	<i>Cold War (1945–1990)</i>	<i>Contemporary (1990–present)</i>
Funding	Massive state and federal investment supplemented by individual/household investment	Diminished state and federal investment supplementing growing individual/household investment
Governance	Highly legitimate peer accreditation based on symbolic review	Peer accreditation facing legitimacy challenge; calls for certification based on precise measurement
Student learning	Rarely measured directly	Increasingly measured directly
Business model	Public and private nonprofits; small for-profit sector	Public and private nonprofits; growing for-profit sector
Mode of delivery	Copresence presumed; minimal options for distance learning	Declining presumption of copresence; rapid proliferation of digitally mediated delivery
Dominant logic	Education for strong and prosperous nation; reward for national service/citizenship	Education for job security and earnings over life course

The ecology idea provides a strong tool for comprehending these changes. We borrow it directly from a vital stream of organizational social science (Aldrich, 1979; Baum & Shipilov, 2006; Hannan & Freeman, 1989). An ecological approach asks analysts to conceive of higher education as comprising myriad service providers, instructional and administrative labor, funders, and regulators interacting in a messy system of educational production. These entities simultaneously cooperate and compete for scarce resources. Resources include students (of varying academic preparation and ability to pay), academic labor, tuition, government and philanthropic financial support, visibility, evaluative authority, legitimacy, and prestige. Ecological approaches ask us to consider how components of the ecology are interdependent. Schools do compete. Higher education is indeed a market. But schools also cooperate: through accreditation and credit transfer systems, tuition exchange agreements, and athletic league affiliations, for example. They routinely exchange ideas, information, and personnel and enter alliances to protect privileged niches.

On this view, student trajectories into and through college are necessary but not sufficient means for understanding how higher education works. We need also to know how schools seek to survive and flourish in a competitive and changing market, how faculty and administrators pursue careers, how accrediting agencies and government education agencies try to maintain their legitimacy, and how philanthropies seek influence and entrepreneurs seek market share.

A big advantage of the ecology idea is that it enables a comprehensive view of the entire higher education sector and so can accommodate the possibility of systemic change. As the resource flows feeding the ecology shift—for example, by the chronic contraction of state-level funding for public colleges—we can expect repercussions throughout the entire ecology. Parties with unmet needs, such as students unable to find seats in desired courses at their local community colleges, may seek comparable services from other kinds of educational providers. New categories of players, such as for-profit academic service purveyors and the venture capital firms funding them, may see opportunity in the dynamic and act entrepreneurially to exploit it. The ecology idea also enables us to see tendencies toward inertia. For members of the organizational population that have flourished under a fading resource arrangement, for example, change may be resisted—especially when change advocates are “outsiders” attempting to direct resource flows in new directions.

As W. Richard Scott explains in Chapter 1, in organizational ecologies change is rarely merely instrumental and its course is never preordained. This is true for several reasons. First, ecologies are culturally thick. They are infused with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings that matter to those who hold them. Any change will be mediated by the cultural commitments and blind spots of powerful players. Second, individuals and organizations are constantly strategizing for their own relative advantage. Change does not just happen to them. Individuals and organizations can opt to work with or against larger change processes, and with or against one another, to further their own particular interests. In the process they shape the course of history in ways that are hard to map in advance. Third, the higher education ecology is extraordinarily complex, with many different kinds of players and resource streams. As in any complex system, apparently small or isolated changes can sometimes have large consequences.

Disruptive Innovation

Colleges and universities with essentially open admissions enroll most U.S. students, yet until very recently they received a small proportion of the scholarly attention given to higher education. Academic researchers, policy makers, journalists, and the general public are often seduced by the glamour of academically selective schools—the handful of elite institutions to which admission is a coveted prize. This attention bias in favor of elites is a generic feature of collective life. But as Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen and his colleagues have now famously explained, it systematically diverts attention from where the most fateful innovation takes place.

In a wide variety of industries, from automobile and steel manufacturing to consumer electronics, the pattern of disruptive innovation is similar. While a given moment's blue-chip firms serve the most coveted clients, canny upstarts outside the limelight of the elite market are figuring out how to profit from the clients that blue-chip providers ignore. Clients who cannot afford today's top products are opportunities for suppliers flexible enough to devise different ways of getting a job done. Unconstrained by the costly performance standards that define tasks in the elite market, upstarts experiment with alternate versions of the product and seek new niches among clients with lesser demands. In the process they lay the groundwork for becoming the next generation's leaders (Christensen & Eyring, 2011).

We concur with Christensen and his colleagues that this is precisely what is happening in U.S. higher education. By the end of the twentieth century, four-year residential higher education had become a mature industry. The bachelor's degree, ideally obtained on the residential campus of a public or private nonprofit school with selective admissions, had become the "real" college education. Schools providing these diplomas were the most prestigious players in the ecology. In Washington, at state capitols, and on accreditation boards, leaders of these schools spoke confidently on behalf of the whole of U.S. higher education. Faculty with tenure-line appointments at these schools enjoyed higher prestige than their colleagues at community colleges and for-profit schools—if indeed these others were regarded as colleagues at all. Higher education social science abetted this prestige hierarchy by consistently emphasizing the greater net returns to timely completion of four-year bachelor's degrees.

Yet by the beginning of the twenty-first century, a great deal of creative activity was taking place in the larger academic world beyond the blue-chip colleges and universities. The diffusion of Internet access, coupled with rapid developments in computer technology and digital media, encouraged an explosion of new online curriculum products and academic services. A long tradition of correspondence schooling developed into a profusion of online college offerings. In Chapter 2, Anya Kamenetz explains how digital media have made possible the development of an extraordinarily diverse array of vehicles for learning. She also points out how venture capital has discovered the great potential of an ever more digital higher education. Washington, D.C., and Silicon Valley calendars are now dotted with annual higher education "summit" meetings where edtech people and money people meet and mingle. The Obama administration's Department of Education now officially speaks in the vernacular innovation.

Having long been a lively but small portion of the higher education ecology, for-profit providers have mushroomed in number and variety in recent years. They offer new versions of college that fit more comfortably into people's lives: delivering courses online, in geographically convenient physical locations, and at a wide variety of hours and start dates. Their occasionally stunning profitability, usually fed by government-subsidized grants and loans, has generated suspicion among the academic establishment in the public and private/nonprofit parts of the ecology. But as Paul Fain and Doug Lederman explain in Chapter 3, for-profits survive and flourish precisely because they do

not play by the rules of the establishment schools. Instead they meet students where they are in their lives and fit services into those lives, all the while doing the ideological work of convincing regulators and the general public that these new educational services are legitimate, “real” college experiences.

With its built-in presumption about college as a physically copresent activity and its normative preoccupation with full-time college enrollment in the years after high school, much higher education social science is poorly fitted to comprehend these phenomena. Yet some forward-thinking scholars had been doing some disruption of their own in recent years by lending sustained attention to adult learners and to community colleges, comprehensive universities, and for-profit schools. The work of scholars such as Paul Attewell, Thomas Bailey, Steven Brint, Patrick Callan, Kevin Dougherty, Jeremy Karabel, David Lavin, and Nancy Shulock provide a solid foundation for a more comprehensive higher education social science. Much of the thinking represented in this book is indebted to that pioneering work.

Nevertheless, describing the whole of U.S. higher education is a formidable intellectual and methodological challenge. Sociologists Martin Ruef and Manish Nag make a large contribution here in Chapter 4, providing a novel means for describing the organizational variety of U.S. higher education quantitatively. They call for an analytic alternative to the Carnegie Classification, a taxonomy developed during the Cold War era of massification and still widely in use despite radically changed ecological conditions. Ruef and Nag draw from recent developments in organizational theory to develop a technique for modeling organizational variety in a manner that accommodates plural, fuzzy, and dynamic organizational characteristics of the ecology. Using the familiar Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to brilliantly novel effect, they demonstrate how schools can be empirically described in many different ways simultaneously: as collections of official identities, or of functions, or as serving particular demographic groups. We believe their approach is a major advance for scholarship in higher education.

College and the Life Course

Higher education has been the primary vehicle for upward mobility in American society for several generations. Guided by social scientists and ambitious philanthropies, the U.S. state and federal governments funded an array of programs that made college attendance an attainable dream for millions of

Americans in the decades following World War II. This historically unprecedented expansion changed the character of U.S. higher education and the composition of the college-going population. The experience of college became much more diverse. Some students lived on residential campuses while others commuted to college, often attending school part time while working and raising families. Some students enrolled in college directly after high school, while others entered or reentered college after years of parenting or paid employment. Yet despite this great variety, the notions of traditional-age students on traditional campuses have retained powerful ideological force.

Traditional is not an empirical description but a normative standard against which other kinds of students and colleges are easily viewed as lesser approximations. Higher education researchers' use of this term has not been ill intended. Enabling one's children to attend college full time, right after high school, has long been a mark of adult prosperity, and the lifelong benefits that accrue to young people who complete four-year college degrees early in life are indisputable. Calling this version of college "traditional" has often gone hand in hand with advocating for its provision to as many Americans as possible. Yet however well intended, the dream of providing four full-time years on residential college campuses to every young person is not a realizable one at present, if ever it was.

It may not even be a good idea. Thoughtful observers are becoming newly suspicious of the purported benefits of full-time residential colleges for all young people. They point to the pervasive party culture on college campuses, huge investments in intercollegiate sports, modest or nonexistent yearly learning gains, majors catering to teenage tastes rather than labor market realities, high and rising rates of school leaving, and sometimes crushing debt from student loans (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Arum & Roksa, 2011; Seaman, 2005; Selingo, 2013). The chronic fiscal crises in public higher education provide additional and probably inarguable incentive for a redefinition of the ideal college experience.

Sociologists Richard Settersten and Regina Deil-Amen provide succinct rationales for such a redefinition in Chapters 5 and 6. For young people coming of age in relatively affluent middle- and upper-middle-class families, college has become a pivotal rite of passage. It marks a special period of increasing independence from parents and an incremental transition to adulthood. While this model of college may remain in place for the most privileged young people, it will not define the experience of the demographic majority

of young adults who experience the transition to adulthood more variably. For them other rites of passage come before, alongside, or instead of college: household formation, marriage, parenthood, first job. There is a profound disconnect between what continues to be called an ideal college experience and the more complicated ways in which most people experience college and early adulthood.

Echoing the basic tenets of the “traditional” college ideal, education researchers have long argued that a variety of paths through college is risky for students. For evidence they point to the inverse relationship between school transitions and college completion. In general, the more frequent the moves into, out of, and across colleges, the less likely students are to finish their degrees. While this empirical association is certainly robust, citing it as evidence to condemn deviance from a full-time pathway discounts how most people attempt to integrate college into complicated lives. This is the problem that an increasingly confident for-profit higher education sector seeks to help people solve. College itself is changing to accommodate real lives. Scholarly models of college must change as well.

The massification of college access in the twentieth century changed the character of the whole of American life. It extended the period of adolescence and brought about a new life stage—early adulthood—with its own challenges and experts (Settersten, 2010). It changed employers’ expectations for what counted as adequate educational preparation for work (Labaree, 1988). It reorganized marital selection (Schwartz & Mare, 2005), transformed the way affluent families raise their children (Stevens, 2007), and in general recalibrated the nature of stratification and inequality (Fischer & Hout, 2006). So we should not be surprised if the remaking of college in the contemporary epoch has repercussions across the society. The increasingly lively national conversations about just what “college” is, how much it should cost, who should pay for it, and when and where it should occur are very telling in this regard. College and the life course are reciprocally evolving.

Assessment and Governance in a Changing Ecology

As this coevolution continues, the assessment and governance of higher education will change as well. There already has been a great deal of national discussion on how academic productivity should be measured as the logic

of fiscal scarcity continues to define policy discourse on higher education. Whether educators like it or not, the government largesse that fed the postwar expansion of the postsecondary sector is unlikely to return anytime soon. This is especially true at the state level, where several decades of antitax politics have structurally constrained the capacity of legislatures to raise more public resources even presuming public will (I. W. Martin, 2008). Providing more education at higher quality and lower cost has become the policy mantra among higher education philanthropies, in state capitols, and in Washington.

U.S. higher education has long enjoyed the privilege of self-governance, in the form of officially voluntary institutional accreditation. I say “officially” voluntary because government tuition grants and subsidized loans are contingent on accreditation, as is the transfer of credit between institutions. Avoiding the accreditation system entirely is impossible for all but the most iconoclastic schools. Yet accreditation is a weak coercive instrument. Accreditation agencies are financially supported by associated schools, which also contribute the faculty and administrative labor to carry out accreditation appraisals. The system is focused heavily on inputs: attributes such as campus facilities, faculty credentials, and academic programs, for example. The signal output measures have historically been graduation rate and average time to degree. More muscular productivity and output measures, such as cost/price per student, measured learning or civic participation, and earnings returns have only recently received anything more than conjectural consideration.

The legitimacy of this inherited regulatory system is now in question. Spiraling college costs and the transfer of ever more of those costs to students and families are key drivers of the new skepticism. A growing and rapidly diversifying for-profit sector is another. Providers whose services and organizational forms bear little resemblance to those expected by accreditation guidelines are eager to see the rules changed, especially when it comes to access to government subsidy. Yet another challenge came in 2011 with the publication of Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa’s *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. This study deployed a highly regarded test of critical-thinking skills to measure student learning in college among a national sample of students on four-year residential campuses. The results were sobering. Nearly half of the students failed to demonstrate any measured learning in their first three college semesters. *Academically Adrift* surfaced the

uncomfortable fact that for many undergraduates, and perhaps also for many faculty, student learning is not a priority.

In their contribution in Chapter 7, Arum and Roksa call for a serious national conversation about what the purposes of college educations should be. Only once we know those purposes can we specify appropriate performance measures. Arum and Roksa make a frank distinction between technical and normative aspects of educational assessment. The technical aspects are the “how” of measurement and are properly the purview of social scientists and psychometricians. But the normative aspects of assessment must not be consigned to measurement experts alone. What features of college performance we choose to measure is a reflection of what we choose to value about higher education. “Deciding what to measure is a political decision,” they write, and thus appropriately the responsibility of citizens and taxpayers, students and their families.

Given the deep implication of higher education in the national political economy, it is remarkable just how little attention political analysts have given to colleges and universities. As William Doyle and Mike Kirst explain in Chapter 8, the preponderance of academic scrutiny given to education has long been directed to K–12 schools. Just why this is the case is a large question that still awaits a sufficient intellectual history, but several pieces of the answer are clear: the much deeper embeddedness of K–12 schools in local politics, the complex intertwining of K–12 school policy with the unfinished project of racial equality in the United States, and the fact that access to elementary and high school educations has been universally required by law. Additionally, as Doyle and Kirst point out, national opinion about higher education has until recently been decidedly favorable. Americans have a respect for higher education in general and may even “love” particular schools in ways that give academic professionals a great deal of political cover. Savvy higher education leaders have long understood this (Thelin, 2004). Yet national sentiment is becoming more critical, feeding conditions for further turbulence in the ecology.

A New Research Agenda

With its dedicated focus on students, twentieth-century educational social science often elided the variety, complexity, and agency of schools as organizations.

The ecology idea enables us to correct this elision. Schools are revealed as *actors*, with their own histories and ambitions. Additionally the women and men who produce higher education come into view as equally analytically important to those consume it. Not just students but also teachers and administrators have careers in the higher education ecology. As the ecology changes, so too do academics' professional lives. Understanding these dynamics is essential for anyone interested in the quality and efficiency of higher education delivery.

As simple as this insight might be, investigating it empirically is difficult. Economists Susannah Loeb, Agustina Paglayan, and Eric Taylor explain why in Chapter 9. First, the production function of colleges and universities is complex. Compared with K–12 schools, colleges and universities have a wide variety of expected outputs. Broad-access colleges must be many things to many people, providing instruction on a broad range of academic knowledge. At comprehensive universities, faculty research outputs may be valued at parity with instruction or given priority. Athletic programs may consume a great deal of administrative and student attention. Second, student learning in college has rarely been systematically measured, making it hard to compare instructional productivity across classrooms, faculty, organizational divisions, and schools. Third, there are no national-level data describing the population of postsecondary instructors and administrators. The study of human resources in higher education remains a frontier, but there is much to learn from the now-mature scholarship on teacher and administrator labor markets in K–12 schools. Loeb, Paglayan, and Taylor extract these lessons here.

There also is much to learn from researchers in broad-access schools themselves. During the course of this project we were humbled to learn just how much quantitative data and research wisdom exists at the level of particular colleges and universities. Academic researchers too rarely recognize these organization-level assets. We have been convinced that better bridging academic and institutional research is a necessary task of any purposeful higher education social science. In Chapter 10, economists Michal Kurlaender, Jessica Howell, and Jacob Jackson provide a vivid case for how this kind of research cooperation can be productively pursued.

We seek to encourage a radical expansion of the research landscape of U.S. higher education. We want to incorporate the essential insights of prior scholarly generations without being limited by outdated assumptions. We want to recognize the coevolution of the higher education ecology and the character of the life course. We want to figure out how instructional and administrative

performance can be transparently and humanely assessed, how occupational excellence can be encouraged and rewarded over the arc of entire careers, how meaningful learning and personal development can be nurtured among the widest possible range of learners. In Chapter 11, Daniel Klasik, Kristopher Proctor, and Rachel Baker serve the corpus of this book by providing a concise map of the expanded terrain.

Our work is not merely academic. Good scholarship never by itself engenders good change, but it properly clarifies the terms of debate. What is college for? What kinds of purposes and students get priority? Which species of life in the higher education ecosystem are essential to preserve, which are best lost to history, and what new kinds should be seeded and encouraged? We hope that these essays surface such questions and usefully inform their discussion.